

Designing Futures with Care

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Transitioning to other worlds through principles-based design

How do we design for the worlds we want?

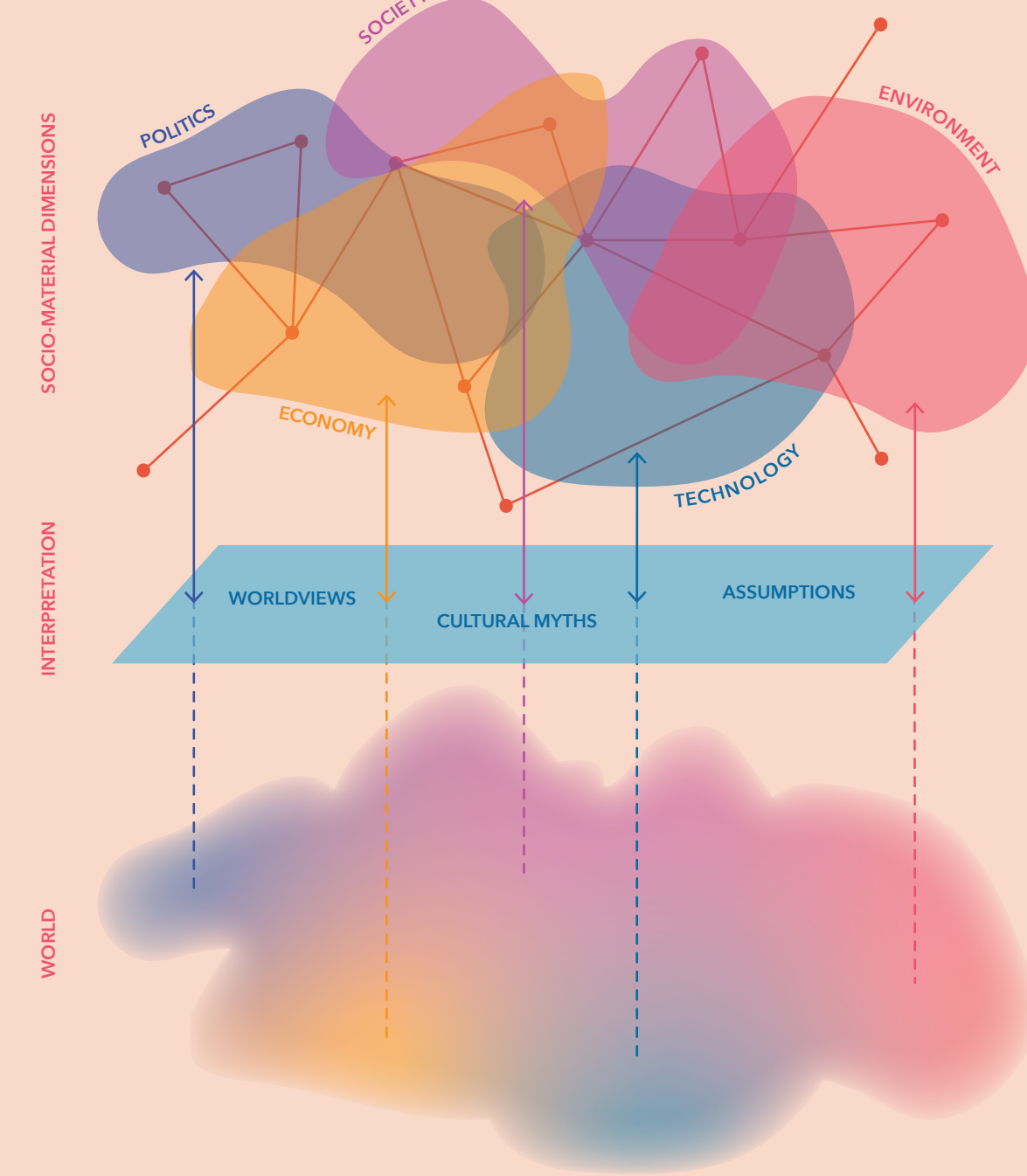
No matter what, the future is going to be different from the present. Designing for the worlds we want is about the attempt to direct what this difference might look like: different ways of living, different social practices, different economies, different politics. Transitioning to different futures requires intentional, collective action to shape uncertainty and direct the prevalent forces of change.

TRANSITION: the intentional process of orienting change toward a desired future

Current converging social, economic, and environmental crises call for a "great transition." Design is one practice through which people attempt to intervene in the processes of transition. Yet, designing for transition requires a unique way of practicing. What does it mean for designers to practice in a way that aligns with transition?

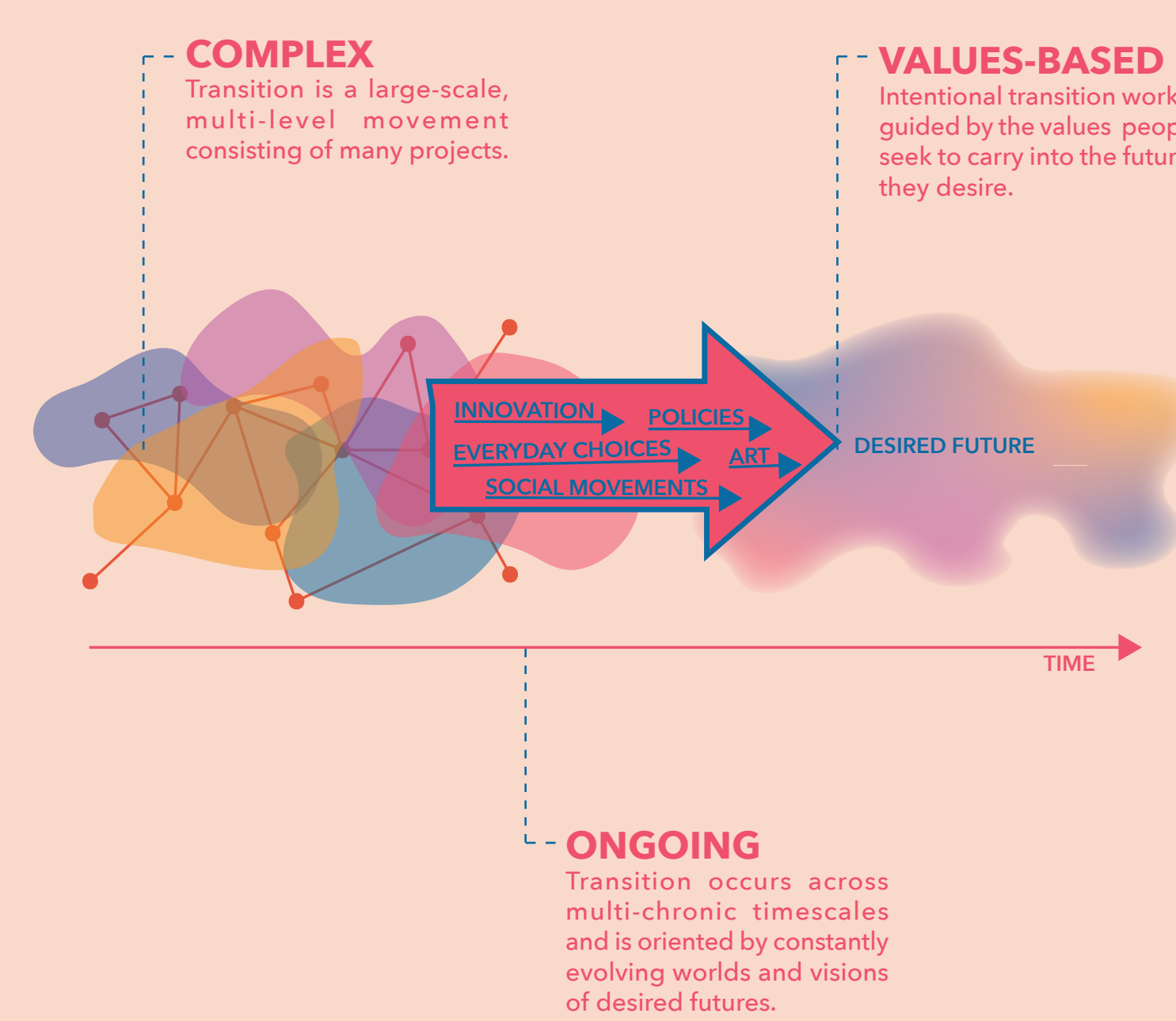
Transitioning worlds

We borrow from Arturo Escobar to outline an ambition to "transition to an altogether different world". Worlds are layered and complex, composed of intertwined socio-material dimensions.



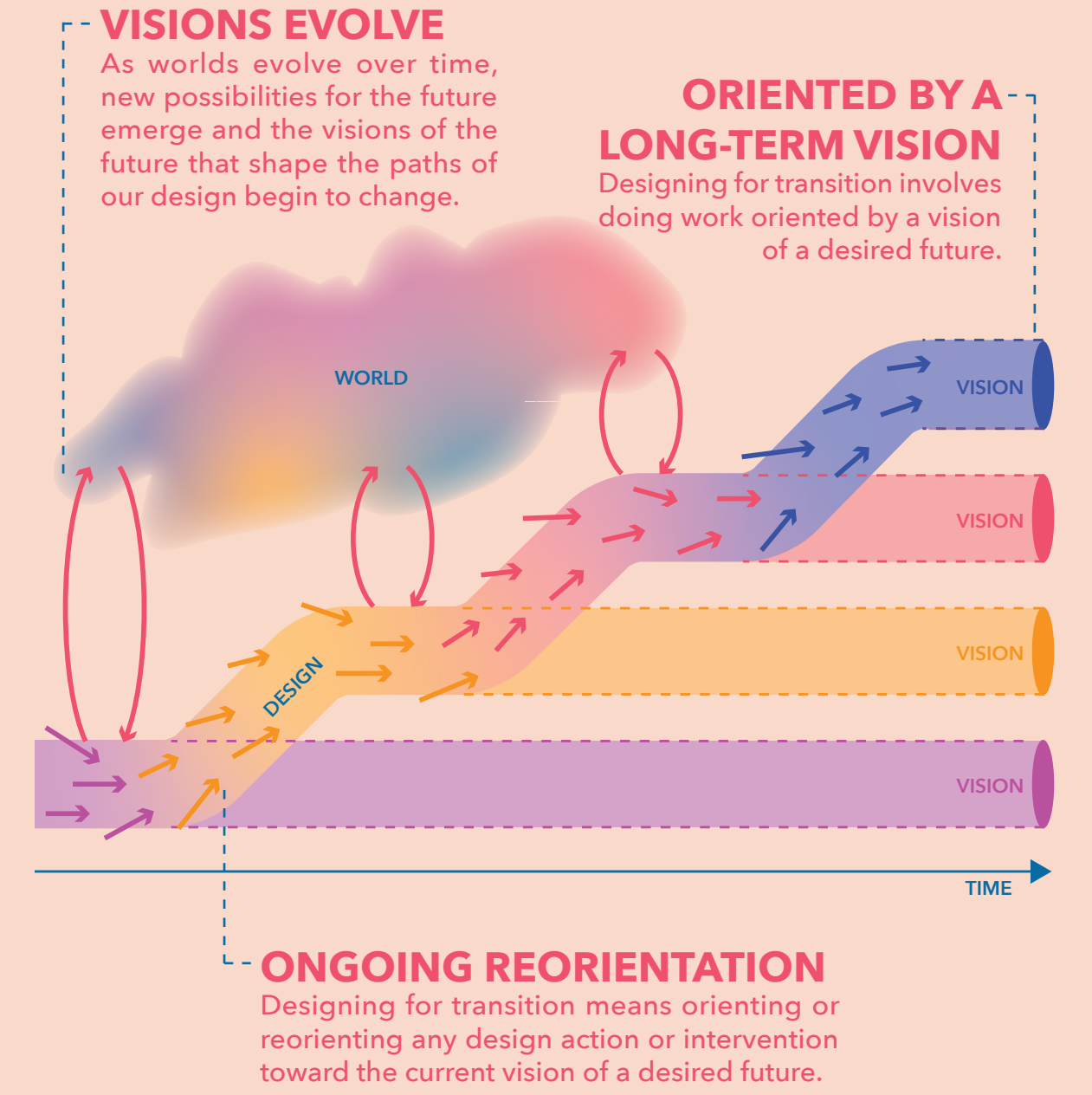
Unique qualities of transition

We understand three main qualities that together come to define transition. Transition is: 1) complex, 2) ongoing, and 3) values-based.



Designing for transition

Designing for transition is informed by a vision of a desired future. Design actions work toward creating this future, and are reoriented in an ongoing way as visions evolve.



Principles-based designing for transition.

Principles-based design is a way for designers to be explicit about the principles and values that guide their design processes so they can consider whether they are effective for their purposes.

We developed a set of principles to guide design practices following the unique qualities of transition. They allow us to intentionally and explicitly make our design practice specifically suitable for transition.

What is a principle?

Principles direct human action by "[providing] guidance about how to think or behave toward some desired result" (Patton, 2017). We are talking about principles that are applied during the design process and against which the design process is evaluated.

Why principles?

Principles are useful when navigating complex, dynamic situations. They help direct and inform what should be done while still leaving room for interpretation and response to context. Transitions are complex and evolving, and so principles-based design is a particularly suitable approach.

Our principles.

PRINCIPLES BASED ON THE UNIQUE QUALITIES OF TRANSITION

1. COMPLEXITY

Understand and work with context instead of treating the future as a blank slate.

2. ONGOINGNESS

Focus on the process instead of the end vision.

3. VALUES-BASED

Design in a way that aligns with the values of the world being transitioned toward.

PRINCIPLES BASED ON THE TRANSITION YOU WANT

3.1 VALUE 1

Principle: _____

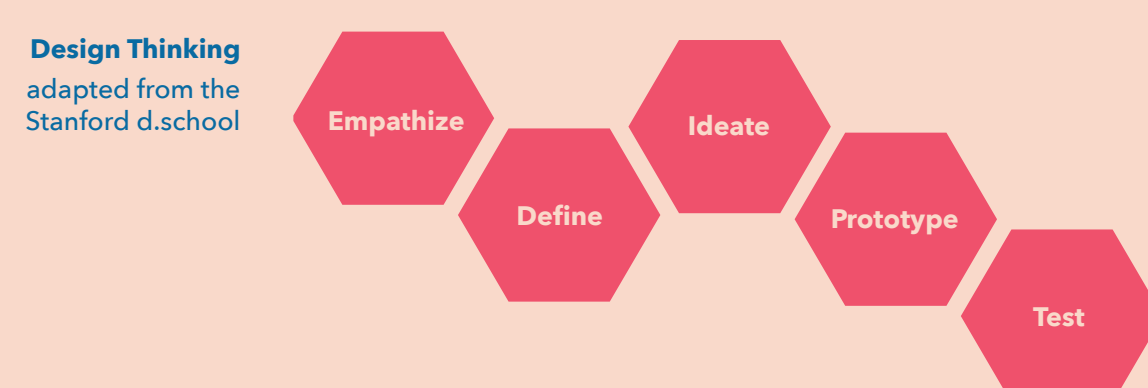
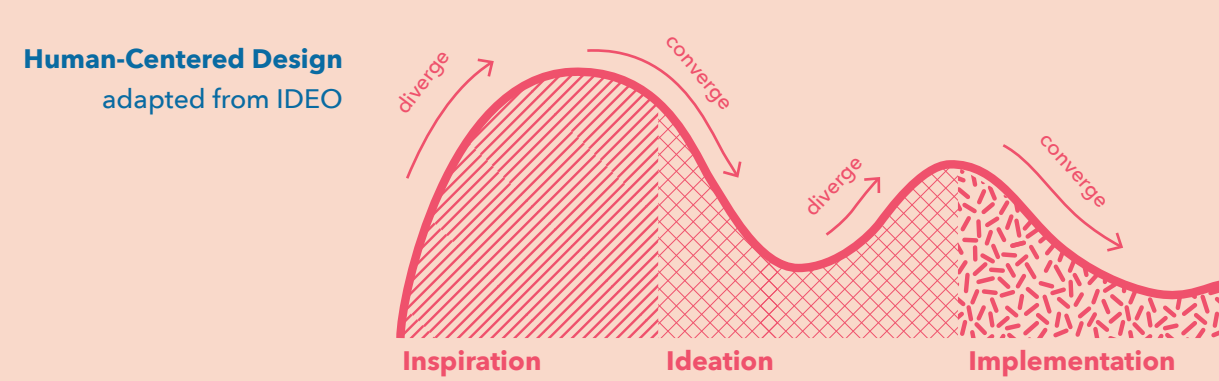
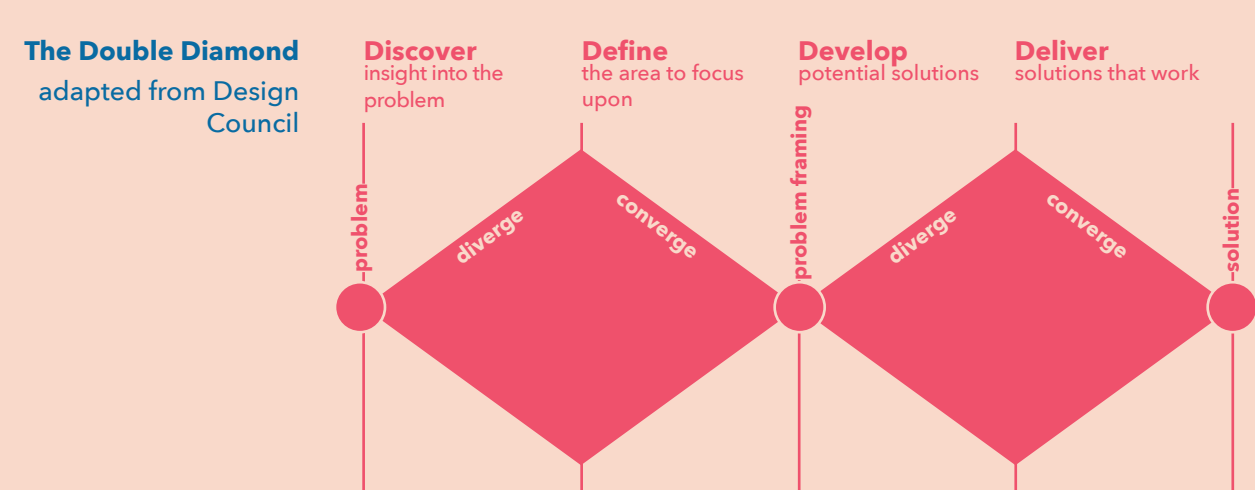
3.n VALUE N

Principle: _____

Principle-focused evaluation

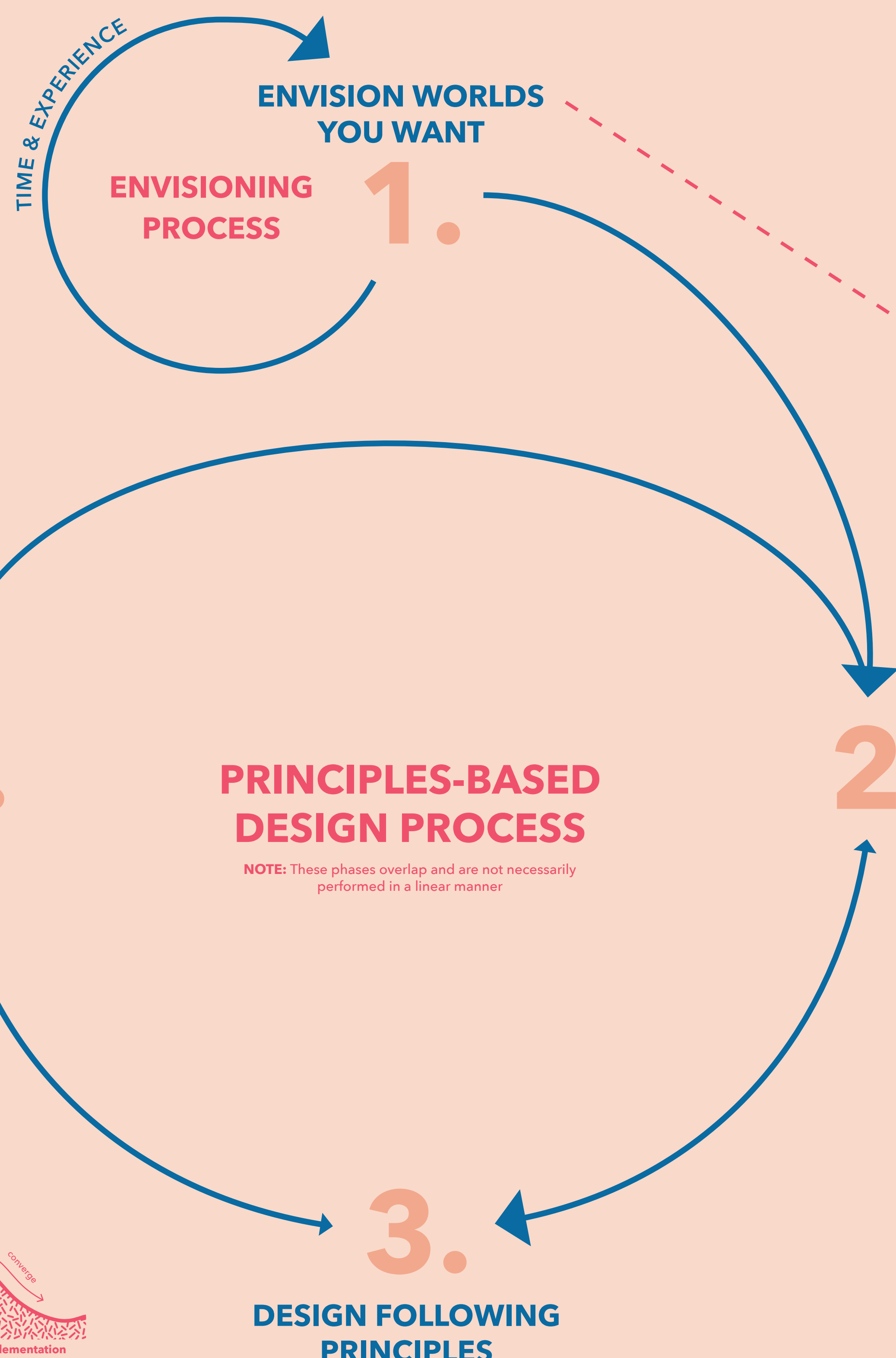
Properly evaluating principles requires testing them in practice. Ask yourself:

1. Are the principles clear, meaningful, and actionable?
2. Are the principles being followed?
3. Are the principles leading to the desired results?



Design processes

No matter how you define your design process, consciously align your choices with your principles.

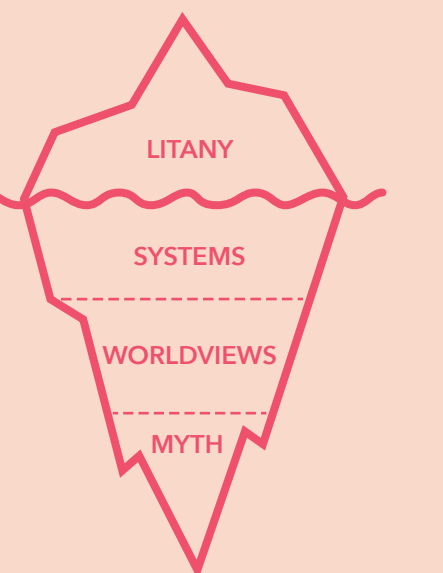


Understand core values

Designing in a way that is explicitly informed by the values of the world being transitioned toward is a meta-principle of sorts. The values depend upon the designer and their vision of a desired future.

Causal layered analysis

To understand core values, you might use a framework like Causal Layered Analysis (CLA). The four layers of CLA get deeper to understand a world from its surface-level manifestations to its deepest, unconscious roots.



Reflections:

Principles are reductionist but make complexity more manageable.

Developing principles is a way of organizing and feeling comfortable with complexity. This makes principles an incomplete, imperfect way of orienting transition design, yet it also makes principles an effective way to communicate ideas that are otherwise too complex.

Transition requires reframing how we think about principles.

When discussing principles in the context of transition, it is important to emphasize that the focus is not on the principles themselves but on maintaining an ongoing conversation about how values inform one's work.

Really, it is all about reflective practice.

Principles-based design does not entirely align with the qualities of the world we hope to transition toward. Using principles-based design as a way to hold reflective conversations, however, may be a start. Principles-based designing is a way of paying attention to our own ways of practicing design for transition.